Celebrate a Trait

Make an art object to tell the story of one of your traits, where you picked it up, and how you pass it along.

We each have a special trait. Perhaps you are kind, courageous or stubborn. Maybe you are curious. Whether you're optimistic or adaptable, accident prone or obsessive compulsive, this trait contains a story about you.

When telling the story of the artist Jeff London, we focused on one trait: creativity, and more specifically, how to instill creativity in others. This focus helped shape the book *Caustic Merriment: The Art and Times of Jeff London & Friends.* The book illustrates how we can transmit creativity from one person to another, and this exercise is a good example of that.

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Your trait tells a story

Perhaps you already know the trait you want to turn into art. If not, is indecisiveness your trait, or are you nervous about making a private trait public?

When you know what trait you will celebrate, ask yourself why that one. What does it evoke for you? Is it a private trait that wants to set the story straight, or is it already in plain view but wants to tell its backstory?

This trait is part of you, perhaps by nature or nurture. Think of your earliest recollections of exhibiting this trait. Do you remember when the world also started to notice that you have it?

Turn your trait into art

You are going to offer your trait to others in the form of an artwork. This symbolic object will embody your trait and make it adoptable. Your piece may be in motion like a kite, or as still as a paperweight. Whether your creation is written, pictorial, or sculptural, the importance is the narrative it conveys.

Let's say you're lazy, how can you make laziness into an adoptable art object, that lets others be lazy like you?

If you know how the trait developed in you, you will be on your way to getting others to adopt it, too.

How it works

1. **Determine.** Pick your trait. Mindmap why you chose that trait, including significance, benefits and downsides, as well as how you got that trait and who you might offer it to. What elements are needed to tell this story?
2. **Discover.** Gather as many anecdotes, stories, visuals, artifacts, and materials as you can. Note down your own memories and recollections. Talk with people about their connection to the trait you are demonstrating. Can anyone tell you about the origin of your trait? How do others perceive it in you? How is this trait impacting you and those around you?
3. **Discern.** Notice the symbols, patterns, and themes in the materials you have. Create a few storylines that could be drawn from the data. Ask people which storyline resonates with them. Reflect on which narrative appeals most to you.
4. **Decide.** Pick an angle for your narrative and curate your ma-terials to support that direction. Aim to have one big idea, trimming tangents while ensuring you have everything you need to support your idea and shape your piece. If this trait was physical, what would it be made of? Should it be paper or wood? Soft or mechanical? Realistic or abstract? Interactive, experiential, or pedagogical?
5. **Design.** Pull together the ideas from your brainstorm and sketch out the best form to carry your story. Is it a poem, a painting, or a sculpture? Could it be a dinner party, a happening, or a shrine? Whether you decide on making a time capsule, a calendar, or a book, now you simply need to make it.
6. **Deliver.** To complete the circle, give it away. Share what you have come up with—with the people involved or a wider audience. Let your thoughts be known, as a manifestation of the trait and its place in the world.

Share a story

What has making art out of your traits meant for you? Do you feel the piece tells your story? How true or not true is the portrayal of your trait? Did new views on the subject emerge? What insights have you had into yourself and your way of working? How have you dealt with people's reaction to the piece? To what degree has the trait been understood or adopted by others?

Give a piece of yourself away